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**CONCEPTS OF “SUFFICIENCY” IN WOMEN’S PHYSICAL
ACTIVITY FOR HEALTH: LAY PERSPECTIVES AND THE
NATIONAL GUIDELINES**

**A thesis presented as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the
degree**

MASTER OF SCIENCE - RESEARCH

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

BELINDA GAY GILES B.A.

School of Health Sciences

2008

ABSTRACT

The relationship of physical activity to population health is currently an area of intense interest because of the economic and social cost of inactivity related morbidity and mortality (Stephenson et al. 2000). Efforts to address the perceived increase in insufficient physical activity are largely unsuccessful (Bauman et al. 2001). National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 1999) were published in 1999 within the social and historical context of the Active Australia policy. Evidence suggests older people have a concept of sufficient physical activity that does not comply with the current health promotion definition (Crombie et al. 2004; O'Neill and Reid 1991). Women are most likely to be judged insufficiently physically active (Armstrong et al. 2000).

This was a qualitative investigation of concepts of sufficiency in physical activity for health voiced by Australian women in their fifties. Their concepts are contrasted to a professional concept of sufficient physical activity identified in published definitions, and portrayed in the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 1999). Semi-structured interviews with thematic analysis were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the concepts of sufficiency in physical activity for health from the lay perspective of women in their fifties?
2. How do their perceptions compare to the recommendations expressed in the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians?

Eleven women in their fifties who spoke English as a first language volunteered as participants. They were contacted through local civic and adult leisure learning institutions.

This study established that lay women's concepts of sufficiency are not expressed in a manner comparable with the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians. They do not use the language of 'physical activity'. The study identified eight indicators of sufficiency used by the women. These are:

1. Intrinsic Value Indicators
2. Individual Expression Indicators
3. Moral or Values Indicators
4. Alignment with Family Responsibilities
5. Physical Sense Indicators
 - a. General Sense
 - b. Embodied Sense
6. Body Weight Indicators
7. Ability Indicators
8. Therapeutic or Professional Advice Indicators

From this study, three outcomes emerge to inform understanding about gendered relationships around the commendation of physical activity for health:

- 1) Women comprehend calculative rationalities but do not employ them exclusively to assess the sufficiency of their physical activity.
- 2) The meaning of a physical activity is significant in lay women's determination of an actions relationship to health and therefore its contribution to sufficient physical activity for health.
- 3) The work/leisure boundary impacts on women's physical activity and presents an area of theoretical exploration in future investigation of sufficiency of physical activity for health.

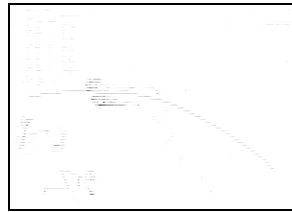
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Thank you to my precious family.

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To the faceless, nameless, persons who developed the postgraduate research infrastructure at the University of Wollongong, congratulations for building something very useful of which you should be proud.

"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." - Albert Einstein

"I reject your reality and substitute my own." – Adam Savage (Mythbusters, Beyond Productions)

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